

Ben Barka's Abductors on Trial

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AS IS usually the case with sensational trials, the atmosphere in the long and echoing corridors of the Paris Palais de Justice is pretty tense. Policemen carefully check passes to the main courtroom, newspaper photographers crowd at its entrance. Lawyers in rustling black robes whisper with their clients or their clients' friends....

On trial are six persons involved in the abduction of Mehdi Ben Barka, the well-known Moroccan opposition leader who was kidnapped outside the Lipp Café in the busy Boulevard Saint-Germain in Paris on October 29 last. There is probably not a single newspaper in the world that has not written about the crime.

Ben Barka, just arrived from Geneva, was hastening to a rendezvous with Philippe Bernier, author of the scenario of an anti-colonialist film called "Basta," producer Georges Franju and publisher Georges Figon. It proved to be a trap. At the entrance to the café, he was confronted by two police officers who took him away in a car. That was the last time Ben Barka was seen.

Investigations went on for half a year. There were dozens of versions suggested as to who could have kidnapped him and why. In mid-November the French authorities arrested the two policemen, Louis Souchon and Roger Voittot, who admitted that they had helped "abduct" Ben Barka to assist the French secret service, or rather its agent Antoine Lopez. Taken into custody, the latter said he thought he was carrying out the instructions of secret agent Marcel Le Roy.

Le Roy was detained too. He also

Articles about the Ben Barka affair were published in *New Times* No. 49 of December 8, 1963, and No. 5 of February 2, 1966.

admitted that he had known of Ben Barka's abduction but "thought" that he was merely taken to meet some Moroccan officials. After that French newspapers published exposés by Figon, who claimed that among those involved in the kidnapping were General Mohammed Oufkir, Moroccan Home Minister, Mohammed Dlimi, his aide, and Miloud Chtouki, a Moroccan secret service agent, as well as gangsters Boucheseiche, Le Ny, Palisse and Dubail. Figon, who was in hiding, gave interviews in which he said Ben Barka had been murdered at Boucheseiche's villa.

The detectives needed Figon to verify this information. They searched for him and finally found him. But just as the police were breaking into his flat, Figon committed suicide. The investigators thus lost their star witness and could add little to what was already known. What they established was that Ben Barka had been kidnapped with the assistance of some French civil servants and that the whole thing had been directed from abroad. This was stated in a French Cabinet communiqué published in January. It was a question, it said, "of a criminal enterprise organized from abroad with the connivance of certain French secret agents and police." The Interpol (International Police Association) was asked to help find the gangsters involved. The search proved to be fruitless.

The court hearings now in process are to establish the part played in the crime by each accused and the truth about Ben Barka's abduction. Both tasks are difficult. The six men in the dock all played secondary parts. That they were involved in one way or another is not doubted by anyone. It is only a question of exactly how much. But who ordered

the abduction? Who directed it? What happened to Ben Barka? The accused cannot, or will not, answer these questions.

Questioned by the judge, the state prosecutor and the defence lawyers, they give evasive answers and minimize their own part. At times, Judge Pérez interrupts the lawyers to tell them they cannot ask this or that question. Newspapers say this is done in order "not to divulge state secrets."

After twenty-five sessions, the court has finally clarified some important details of the crime and succeeded in determining the part each accused played. Cross-examinations have revealed, for instance, that French secret agents Lopez and Le Roy knew about the plans to kidnap Ben Barka. For some reason, however, they did not report them to their superiors. Lopez has also admitted that he accompanied Gen. Oufkir to the villa to which Ben Barka was taken. He thought it was to be a business rendezvous to discuss Ben Barka's possible return home to Morocco. He does not know what happened after that.

"I was told to go to bed," Lopez said.

The Paris *Monde* writes that it is highly doubtful that an experienced agent would "retire" when an important event in which he was directly involved was taking place right there.

"As an employee at Orly Airport," the prosecutor asked Lopez, "you could easily go abroad without a passport. Could you just as easily send luggage abroad?"

To this Lopez replied:

"You won't trap me, Monsieur...."

The French press has written that with Lopez's help Ben Barka could have been smuggled out of France in a plane, either alive or dead.

The main argument put up by the two accused French secret agents is that they acted of their own free will in the belief that they were

doing Ben Barka and Moroccan officials a favour.

"It is quite possible," Lopez told the court, "that we all helped organize the meeting, which ended badly or was used differently..."

The court has also sought to clarify the part played by Bernier. Did he know, he was asked, that in inviting Ben Barka he was luring him into a trap? Bernier, who was on the verge of nervous collapse, said he didn't. But who, then, told the organizers of the abduction about the time and place of the meeting?

"Figon," Bernier replied.

And Figon is dead and cannot give his version.

The court has questioned many witnesses, including Police Commissioners Marchand and Bouvier, CID Chief Grimaud, and Paris Police Prefect Papon. They have all told about the searches made, about the first reports which came on the day Ben Barka was kidnapped. Their testimony seeks to persuade the court that the French police has done everything in its power to solve the mystery and find the culprits.

These high-ranking police officers are highly pleased with themselves: they have helped put six men in the dock, and if any are still at large, that is because there is nothing they can do about it...

In the last few days the court has been busy questioning French secret agents. The testimony reveals that the part played by Col. Le Roy is not so insignificant as he tried to tell the investigators. He is accused of concealing the crime from his superiors. But why? Neither his former superiors nor he himself can explain.

"I will say everything, M. le juge," Le Roy exclaimed when questioned, "if you promise that I will not be tried by a state security court for it."

The judge promised him that. On the following day Le Roy said:

"I have said everything. You got me wrong yesterday."

People attending the hearings have

the impression that Ben Barka is no longer alive. That was what his brother, Abdelkader Ben Barka, told the court.

"I am sure that Mehdi is dead," he said. "But our family would like to know how he could have been abducted on French soil."

This understandable desire of Ben Barka's family is shared by Frenchmen who have time and again voiced indignation at the crime, which has badly harmed their country's prestige.

The hearings are nearing an end. The court has heard dozens of prosecution and defence witnesses and representatives of the plaintiff—the Ben Barka family. There were many times when it looked as though the testimony would lift the veil over the mystery. It didn't. There is not one newspaperman among the hundred or so covering the trial who can say that the hearings have got to the bottom of the crime

Paris



What It Means...

A Brief Guide to Political Terminology

YANKEE

A popular name for a citizen of the United States of America. It is a word of uncertain origin and dates back to the 18th century. The Encyclopedia Britannica believes it derives from the Dutch Janke, Little John. During the War of Independence, the British colonialists used it to deride New Englanders, who accounted for the bulk of the forces fighting for liberation. Later, during the Civil War, it was used by the Southern slaveowners for the Northern champions of Negro emancipation. In the United States itself, the word has long lost its derisive connotation. In other parts of the world, the fate of the word has been different. After World War I, and especially after the second world war, it became common in international usage as a nickname for Americans in general and for members of the U.S. armed forces in particular.

SIT-IN

Denotes one of the forms of the U.S. Negroes' movement for civil rights, popular in the late fifties and the early sixties. Fighting against racial segregation, Negroes would enter a café, a restaurant or any other public place "for whites only," sit down and refuse to leave. The sit-ins were usually attended by violence on the part of the local police and white mobsters—they resorted to force to evict Negroes from such places.

QUISLING

Name given in World War II to prominent persons co-operating with the enemy who occupied their

countries. It derives from Vidkun Quisling, leader of Norway's fascist National Union. In 1940 he helped the nazis in their invasion of Norway and was later named by them "minister president." In this capacity he was involved in numerous atrocities and did everything to suppress the Resistance movement. After Norway's liberation in May 1945 he was arrested, tried, found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. He was executed on October 24, 1945. Quisling is now commonly used as a synonym of "traitor."

ROUND TABLE

Any meeting place of a group, or representatives of different groups, for conference or discussion of urgent issues. It presupposes a free discussion and respect of opponents' views. The term derives from legends about King Arthur and the magician Merlin, who advised Arthur's father, Uther Pendragon, to institute the order of the Knights of the Round Table. During their talks or at dinner, they sat at a huge circular marble table so that there would be no quarrels for the place of honour.

UNCLE SAM

Popular name for the United States. Its origin is unknown but it is very credibly attributed to the initials U.S. It came into international usage about the time of the outbreak of the Anglo-American War of 1812.